Teen And Up Audiences

Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Gen
M/M

Don't Hug Me I'm Scared (Webseries)

Duck/Red Guy (Don't Hug Me I'm Scared)
Duck & Red Guy & Yellow Guy (Don't Hug Me I'm Scared)

Red Guy (Don't Hug Me I'm Scared)
Duck (Don't Hug Me I'm Scared)
Yellow Guy (Don't Hug Me I'm Scared)

Nightmares
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD
Guilt
Psychological Trauma
Canon-Typical Violence
Crying
Hurt/Comfort
Angst with a Happy Ending
Family Feels
Emotional Baggage
savior complexes
Self-Esteem Issues
Hugs
Cuddling & Snuggling
Family Dynamics
Families of Choice
No meddling from Lesley in this one she's just watching with a glass of wine and some popcorn
The nightmare is very graphic just FYI

English ← Previous Work Part 4 of home is where I want to be, but I guess I'm already there Next Work → IM DEALING WITH IT , moby's fav dhmis fics +_+

the deep stitches of nightmares

LittleMeowMeowEnjoyer

Summary:

The house is dark, a blue-gray glow filtering in the windows, like the light before dawn. The kitchen stands empty, endless. It reminds Red of the day they learned about electricity, from that tiny, robot girl that had leapt from the box on the wall. Once again, the room is nearly pitch black, as if he were living through a repeat of that day. The one with batteries and teachers, dead and alive. A day haunted by green eyes and quiet confessions. The checkered linoleum stretches on and on, boundless, passing far beyond the point that Red could see.

Why was he back here?

Where were the other two?

Notes:

I wanted to start this out by thanking each and every one of you that has left a comment on any of my fics! Honestly, the feedback I receive from you all is what gives me the urge to write, and the reception I've gotten on this AU has been so amazing! Your comments have me giggling and kicking my feet at work I swear 🥹

Again, this is an AU where Lesley is leaving them alone because it's more fun to see whatever they've got going on when not under extreme duress. So, they're finally exiting survival mode and leaving room for some post traumatic burn out/breakdowns. I think Red has been proven to be a character prone to angry outbursts when upset, so I looked into the relationship PTSD has with anger for this one!

TW: Red's nightmare is very graphic, but I think it's well in line with the gore in the show, so just tread lightly if this sort of thing bothers you. Skip to the bolded and italicized "NO!" if you just want to read the hurt/comfort/fluff portions of this fic!

EDIT: We've got some absolutely beautiful fanart!!!!! Please please please go give it all the like and reblogs and love it deserves!!!!!!!!
https://www.tumblr.com/mookquartet/700865693018636288/the-deep-stitches-of-nightmares

EDIT 2: My friend has SCULPTED Duck's decapitated head and given me permission to post it to my tumblr EVERYBODY GO LOOK!!!!
https://www.tumblr.com/myshredda/701851365170872321/gore-tw?source=share

EDIT 3: More lovely art!!!!!!! Go give it some attention!!!
https://www.tumblr.com/handibrain/702132728959827968/he-is-witnessing-the-horrors-sorry-bud-based

(See the end of the work for more notes (#work_endnotes).)

The house is dark, a blue-gray glow filtering in the windows, like the light before dawn. The kitchen stands empty, endless. It reminds Red of the day they learned about electricity, from that tiny, robot girl that had leapt from the box on the wall. Once again, the room is nearly pitch black, as if he were living through a repeat of that day. The one with batteries and teachers, dead and alive. A day haunted by green eyes and quiet confessions. The checkered linoleum stretches on and on, boundless, passing far beyond the point that Red could see.

Why was he back here?

Where were the other two?

A dim bulb flickers on, hanging from the frayed wire above the dining area, a sickly yellow light infecting the room. It barely illuminates the space around the table, the kitchenette still a vague smear of bulky shapes in the foreground. The lampshade is gone, and fat bluebottle flies cling lazily to the bulb, casting strange shadows in the dingy haze.

Red takes a step, then another, drawing closer to the abandoned table. It's covered in a thick layer of grime and filth, interspersed with a tacky, brown crust that has stained down to the grain of it. Skinny slivers of exposed wood poke through the dreck, as if slashed by a knife, a few green feathers caught in the ruts. There's no chairs, or if there were, they'd been smashed to splintered bits amongst the piles of trash that litter the floor.

When did those get there?

The buzz of dying flies grows louder, like the angry hum of a downed powerline. And then, from the deafening drone of insect wings, a wet thud can be heard.

Thump. Thump. Thump. Over and over, like a heartbeat, sending vile, black blood back into the body. Keeping the putrid flesh alive with some instinctual, unwelcome prolongment of a slow death.

Thump. Thump. Thump. A pause. As if the heart were finally giving up, sputtering out, cardiac arrest seizing the macerated muscle, veins running dry- before it starts up again.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

There's a movement near the fridge, almost imperceptible. Semi-visible now to Red, his eyes slowly adjusting to the dim light. It's round, well, round-ish. Leisurely rolling back and forth, knocking itself gently into the baseboard with a

squelch.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

"Hello?" Red chokes out, voice as dry as dust. The shape pauses again, as if listening, before resuming its movements. The buzzing of flies grows louder still, an insectile drone ringing in Red's ears, tinnitus burrowing its way into his brain.

"*Hello?* Wh-what is this?" Red coughs, finally raising his voice above a whisper. "Where am I?"

"You're in the kitchen," a voice calls out. The shrill tone of it cuts through the hum, plunging the kitchen into silence. "You stupid beast."

"D-duck?" Red's body shakes, step by step he makes his way to the dark shape in the corner, legs trembling. His body is screaming at him to turn, to run, to leave this place that feels as close to hell as he's ever been, but he can't. He can't leave Duck here, not now, not ever. The shape pauses, strangely still, a gloomy mass surrounded by crawling shadow, inky shapes twisting and writhing in the edges of his vision.

He reaches to grasp the circular object, hands shaking, drawing the meaty thing into the light. It's Duck, or rather, his head. One eye hangs limply, dangling uselessly from its socket, still dripping with gore and jellied vitreous. Veiny tendrils of pink and blue cling to the ropey optic nerve, swaying and bumping the unseeing eye moistly against viridescent feathers. Dark blood is drooling out of the jutting stump of his neck in a gummy crawl, staining Red's hands, and the eye that's left in its socket is cloudy white, like a corpse. His beak is cracked and scabrous, pieces of keratin flaking off and leaving behind flecks of maroon pocked in his grimy bill.

"You replaced me so quickly, with that horrid claymation creature." The mangled beak cracks open, unnaturally agape, a putrid, brown liquid pouring down and out onto the tiles. Maggots fall, wriggling, glinting in the low-light, pale flecks of white writhing in the muck. "Did I really mean so little to you?"

"N-no. No! I was trying to- *I meant to*- I just wanted you *back!*" Red's heart hammers in his chest, vision blurring, how had he let this happen? Duck had been fine last night, happy and whole, head firmly attached to shoulders. His arms started to shake, jostling the mangled thing clenched in his hold.

"Tish tosh," Duck's skin ripples with movement, more larva crawling from his eye socket, his ears, the gaping maw. Gelatinous blood leaks steadier now, leaving his jugular with thick, syrupy glugs, like the horrific rhythm of someone being disemboweled. All soggy thwacks and watery splatters, the sound of organs loosened from the cradling curve of ribs and filmy peritoneum, released wetly down onto the dirty swath of floor. "You're *such* a liar, always strutting around with your big words and bigger body. You *LIKED* being the only one with a working cerebrum!"

"Please, I-I didn't mean to- I wasn't trying to replace you, I just, *I missed you so much.*"

"You wanted to be rid of me, you selfish thing. You wanted me dead; I know you did." The head cackles, wildly, unsocketed eye swinging. "You kept saying you wanted to be the dead one, but that was a *lie. The lady doth protest too much, methinks!* You're too much of a coward to be dead."

The decapitated head shrieks again with laughter, a chunk of flesh tumbling out his gaping mouth, mottled and purple. Red holds back a retching gag, his stomach punching up into his lungs.

"*No…*" He heaves, voice broken. This wasn't what he'd wanted, this wasn't right at all. He wanted them all to be together, no matter what. Even if it had meant forcing that- that pink *thing,* into the right shape, the right clothes, forced it to eat the right foods and say the right words. But it hadn't worked, and they'd been left with two Ducks. And then, just the one.

"And what about the idiot child? What of him? You left him alone to sulk and skulk around the house!" The head is speaking again, voice loud against the muffled ringing in Red's ears. "Left him to get *ideas* in that withered husk he calls a mind! You were supposed to be the one watching him, and what did you do? Let him dabble in a bit of grave robbery!"

"I didn't- I didn't mean to-" Red feels so dizzy, as if his brain is emulsifying inside his skull, turning it into a worthless soup of fat and fluids. His limbs seem disconnected, much like the decollated head of his housemate, as if they aren't something bound to him with flesh and bone and nerves and blood. As if he's floating above his body, only able to watch, completely detached from the hulking, red thing holding limply to the fast-rotting flesh. "I couldn't- *I didn't know what to do!*"

"And what of me? A useless skull?" Duck continues, voice growing raspier. Skin is slipping off the bone, a meaty mass of feathers and muscle drooping down, revealing the pale expanse of pure white cranium. "*Alas, poor Yorick*, *poor me! Where be my gibes now? My gambols? My songs?* " Tarry ichor is pouring from his empty socket, his mouth, his neck, his ears. "You don't even know if I'm the right one, do you? You don't even care. *Vile beast.* I'm glad to be rid of you, for good this time!"

The heap of skin finally sloughs off with a loud, wet slap. Spraying viscera up onto Red's legs from where it had hit the floor, a dark pile of iridescent, green feathers and putrid flesh. The skull leers up at him, so white, too white. Beak cracking bit by bit, a permanent grin affixed in its skeletal state.

“I hate you,” It shrieks, though its shredded vocal cords lay useless, discarded, membranous tissue assaulted by the swarm of flies. “I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!”

Red’s shaking hands fumble, dropping the skull, eyes blown, watching helplessly as it explodes into powdery shards of bone. Irreparably broken against the black and white squares of tile, cackling laughter cut off by its sudden destruction. The buzzing is back, louder this time, flies burrowing into the sodden slump of feathers and rot.

He stumbles backwards, almost slipping in something slickly wet, hand reaching behind him to catch the edge of the ruined table. His weight is shifting, an ankle twists, he’s coming down hard. Catching the table at a bad angle and snapping the slivered legs, sending him tumbling to the ground with the splintered wood. The light swings jerkily, apparently caught by some fragmented debris and sent into a wild arch.

“Why did you do that?” Another voice says, stupidly, tone confused.

Red lifts his head, groaning, a spasm running through his back. He sits up, agonized, bracing himself against the floor, weight propped on one elbow. “Wh-what? Who's there?”

“Why did you br-eak our t-table?” The voice comes again, sadly. The light is slowing down now, shadows shifting and twisting around the small figure. It’s just on the edge of Red’s vision, stature short, complexion intangible. Red cranes his head to the side, breath shallow with fear.

“Come into the light,” he demands, voice cracking. “I can’t see. Who are you?”

“S’just me.” The figure hunches, slipping farther back into the darkness. “Don’t you rec-recognize me?”

“*No!*” Red keens, sitting up further.

“Aw,” The light stops swinging, abruptly still, as if held in place by an invisible hand. Red can finally see what had tripped him, his feet stained with filmy, black oil. He’s resting in a large puddle of it, streaks of ebony staining the tiles, arching out from where he’d kicked and jerked on the way down. The figure is close again, close enough that Red can see how it drips with the dark liquid. “Too bad. Was gonna asks you something.”

“You were going to- to what?” Red feels his heart stop, seized and stupid in his chest. “Y-Yellow? I-Is that you?”

“Yeh,” The figure comes fully into the circle of light, feet slapping stickily against the squares of white and black. A waterfall of oil is pouring from his mouth, his eyes. His whole body was stained by tar, clumps of hair that had once been blue now plastered to his head, viscid and fetid. “Why did you do it?” He asks again, head cocked to the side, so much viscous sludge is leaking from his mouth the words are nearly impossible to make out.

“Do it?” Red shakes on the floor, like a beaten dog. Mind screaming at him to rise, to run, to save himself. Again, his body doesn’t obey, heart paralyzed by the sight of the little creature he’s come to care so deeply for.

“Leave me all alone. Let me drown.” He’s pulling at his sodden overalls, stripping them away to reveal his chest. The marbled plane of flesh that had once been yellow gives under his hand, flapping open to reveal a gory, red cavern, streaked with bleached flashes of bone. The hollow where his batteries usually were stands empty, idle, torrents of foul blood gushing out to mix with pitchy sludge. “Took my batteries.”

“I’m sorry,” Red’s body heaves, stomach lurching, he can’t hold back a gag at the clear view of Yellow’s open wound. *“I’m so sorry,* I didn’t mean to- *I didn’t know*-”

“But you did.” His slight body is melting now, the oil sluffing skin off with its acrid corrosiveness. One arm is degloved, then the other, fingers peeled back to phalanges. “I had a dream ‘bout drowning in oil. An’ then about eating from cans.” Feathers are pouring from his mouth, body bloated, pink muscles stained with gore and muck. “I hated that dream. And I hate you.”

“No, no don’t- don’t say that!” Red gags again, trying to force his body to move, to do something useful, but it's as if he’s glued to the linoleum. “*Please!*”

“I hate you,” the figure repeats, more gore than person now. A dinky, white skull swimming in the thick, black ink. “I hate you. I hate you. I hate you.”

“*No*,” Red wails out, tears streaking hopelessly down his face. “No, no, no, no!”

“NO!”

Red jerks, thick body twisted in his duvet. A deluge of sweat soaking into the pillows, bedding damp, tendrils of yarn plastered down from the moisture of it. For a moment, all he can hear is his own haggard breathing, the sound of blood rushing through his ears, like the deafening, endless drone of flies. His hands are cold, numb and useless, and then, his head burns. Skull feeling as though it's completely alight, cooking his brain from the inside out. Though he sucks in frantic, heaving breaths, his lungs scream for air. Suddenly, he becomes aware of the bed convulsing, twisting and jerking beneath

him, and for a delirious moment he thinks the house is collapsing. Falling apart around him, pink walls crumbling to crush his yielding flesh, a useless smear of red trapped beneath the rubble. Then, haltingly, he realizes the movement is emanating from him. His whole body trembling, lungs stuttering pathetically, the aftershocks of terror ripping through his muscles, his heart, his mind.

He gags, once, then twice, room whirling around him, head swimming, teaming with the shadows of his nightmare. It's so far away from him now, details slogging down into an unrecognizable blur, but he remembers the smell of rot, the taste of oil pooling on his tongue. The words *'I hate you'* ring through his mind, knocking bluntly against the edges of his skull, spoken by those he's come to care about the most. He can still hear the acidic tones, the gleeful shrieks, words sharp as knives jammed deep into his gut, wielded by his own housemates. His family.

His family.

Red gives a start, forcibly wrenched upright, eyes desperately scanning the room. Heart sinking lower and lower in his chest as he sees that each bed is vacant, neatly made up with crisp corners and flattened pillows. The room is empty, aside from his own cowering form.

Where were they?

He rips free from his bed, knees like jelly, tripping, cursing, tangled in the duvet. Frustration bubbling, he tears at the bedcover, fully wrenching the whole thing to the floor, mattress knocked askew. The room is crossed in an instant, door thrown open, banging sharply against the wall, but he doesn't care. Not when the dread thrums frenzied through his veins, a liquid fear infused in every platelet, every molecule. It felt as though his whole body was made up of one big, throbbing mass of terror, of anguish. Stumbling into the hallway he catches his shoulder on the wall, swearing loudly, thundering his way into the kitchen. Pupils darkened, hands shaking, legs weak to the point of giving out, he rounds the corner, sweat pouring down his face. And then, he's there, stood again in the same spot as his hellish vision. Eyes shielded against the violently cheerful light pouring in through the window, one hand raised, its shadow cast across his face.

It's almost too much to bear, panic gripping at his heart, his throat, icy fingers clawing to stem his life flow. Blood and air spluttering, halting, apprehended by a bone-deep fear. He can't bring himself to look, to see the still-empty room, to realize his dreamed harbinger has bloomed into fruition amidst the cruel light of day. Alone, hopeless, abandoned in this wretched, pink house, he can't even-

"What on *earth* are you doing?"

Red blinks, lowering his hand. Greeted by the sight of Yellow and Duck, sitting at the table, plates of sausage and bacon resting in front of them. Absently, he notes there's a plate at his own spot, a mug of coffee steaming cheerily off to the side. Duck is staring at him like one of his more in-depth crosswords, brows low, gaze suspicious. The youngest one is busy chasing a bit of grizzle around his plate with a fork, tongue sticking out in concentration.

"Wh-what?"

"What do you mean *'what'?* I thought a pack of elephants was coming down the chimney with all that noise you made."

"Herd." Yellow pipes up, happily. Looking up at Red from under his eyelashes, a shy smile on his face, as if proud of himself.

"What was that?" Duck grouses, turning to glower at Yellow. The youngest one simply ignores his glare, bobbing his head in a happy sort of rhythm.

"Elephants live in herds. Like a big family." He's fully grinning now, voice a little smug. "They have babies an' old ones an' young ones an' middle ones, all in a- in a big family herd. And also, they all have one big graveyard. And they walk there when it's time for them to die!"

Duck rolls his eyes before turning back to Red, a flash of amusement ripples through his face before he puts on an annoyed front.

"Pack, herd, *whatever*. Why are you tearing through the house at nine in the morning?"

"I- I, uh…" Red's voice catches, frantic hysteria finally receding. The dream had felt real, so disturbingly real. The nightmarish shadows of Duck and Yellow saying exactly what he always thought about himself, what he was sure their privately held opinions of him must be. "I just, uh, woke up. And neither of you were there, so… So, I thought you'd, uh, you'd gone."

"Thought what? That we'd left?" Duck's face is puckered again, openly scrutinizing Red, taking in his rumpled form. "Don't be stupid. Where do you think we would have gone? To Tesco? *You're* the one with the Clubcard. Anyway, come eat, before all my hard work gets cold. Honestly, I think you both love to let my cooking go to waste."

Duck harrumphs, eyes trailing Red as he slowly makes his way to the table. Pulling out his seat, hesitantly lowering himself down into it, through it all Duck watches, his stare calculating. Suddenly, he snapped his gaze back to focus on the youngest one, glaring at the way he's covered his mouth with one hand to hide giggles.

“I wouldn’t laugh at him. After all, I’m talking to you too. Yes, *you* . don’t look at me like that,” he snips at Yellow, who's put on a sort of *‘who me?’* expression. “Mr. *I-don’t-want-to-eat-my-crusts*. No, no, *no!* Pouty lips don’t work on me, I’m not the big, red brute! Now, you will *listen* to me when I tell you to-”

Red can only sit and stare, stupidly, taking in the simple domesticity of the scene. Drinking in the way Yellow and Duck bicker like normal, squabbling and scuffling over topics that truly didn’t matter. He takes a bite of his bacon, chewing mechanically. Usually his favorite, the crispy flesh feels like ash on his tongue. He can’t shake the bubbles of dread stewing in his gut, insides writhing, much like those wretched *maggots*. A tremor runs through his hand and he fumbles his fork, fingers trembling, the ringing sound of metal scraping on glassware attracting the attention of the other two.

“Are you okay?” Yellow asks, batting Duck’s hand away from his last sausage, quickly stuffing it into his mouth and chewing rapidly. “You look funny.” He says, mouth full.

“Do I?” Red grits out, a feeling of jittery irritation climbing up his spine. He’d been so relieved when he found them here, sitting at the table without a care in the world, but now something akin to annoyance was unfolding inside his chest. He can’t stop shaking, body tensed, teetering on the edge of fight or flight. A pounding has begun to grow in the space behind his left eye, pressure growing as his anger does.

“Yes, you look quite awful actually.” Duck sniffs, expression sour. “Perhaps you should go shower,” He casts a meaningful glance in his housemate’s direction. Red paws at his yarn, agitated. It *was* pretty matted, but he feels annoyed at Duck for bringing it up. What business was it of his?

“Yeah!” Yellow cries, grinning widely, fingers pinching his nose. “You smell funny!”

“I agree, you stink.” Duck laughs then, and the irritating prickle of frustration grows into a painful itch. He’d been so scared for them, more scared than he could ever remember being, and now they’re telling him he stinks. Typical.

“*Whatever,*” The last of the bacon is shoved gruffly into his mouth, shredded between sharp molars. The sausages follow, as does the coffee, which he gulps down in two or three quick chugs. The food rests uncomfortably in his stomach, like he’d eaten wet cement and it had begun to set. He manages a curt *‘thanks’* in his housemate’s direction, shoving his chair unceremoniously back under the table, the legs giving out a wretched squeal as they catch on the linoleum. And for a moment, he’s back there, in the hellish version of their kitchen. Table smashed to bits, the slurried blood of his best friend still staining his legs, floundering on the floor as caliginous sludge leaks from the eyes of the most innocent member of their house.

Bile is crawling up his throat as he blinks rapidly, successfully clearing his thoughts. Great. Now he can’t even look at the table without his senses being assaulted with the stench of oil, the image of rotted feathers flashbulb-bright in his mind.

“I’m gonna go shower,” he mumbles, bringing one hand up to massage his throbbing head.

Duck waves him off, motion dismissive, too focused on badgering Yellow into helping with the cleaning up to look up at him. The motion lights a streak of annoyance deep in his chest, though he doesn’t know why. There’s an anger festering under his skin, in his throat, feeling as though it will crawl up and out of his mouth, spewing out in an unrelenting torrent, seeping like thick, black oil.

Scowling, he stomps his way to the bathroom, legs stiff, shoulders drawn up, like a spring coiled and ready to snap. Not-so-quietly shutting the door and ripping the curtain open, he stares angrily into the bath. Head refusing to turn to his right, unwilling to see how he must look in the mirror, like some feral animal all matted and vicious.

He fiddles with the taps for a moment, turning them as hot as they go, as if he can scorch the memories out through his skin. Hissing as he slips under the stream, yarn immediately plasters itself to his head, clinging to his teeth, getting in his eyes. In his chest the ball of tension grows, why could nothing go right for him today?

The humid heat of the bathroom only makes his headache worse, water drumming against his sore muscles. He feels disoriented in the enclosed space of the shower, breath quickening, like the heated air can’t be fully drawn into his lungs, heart beating fast. God, what is *wrong* with him? He glares at the shower caddy, at Duck’s fancy bath oils and that stupid shampoo Yellow insists on buying. The bottle stares back at him with its single, bulbous eye, gleeful text promising *‘no more tears!’* which was an absolute lie. Red had lost count of the number of times the youngest had gotten the soap in his eyes, his voice reduced to wails, shrieking and crying about being blinded for life. Red glares harder at the bottle, as if it were at fault for his bad mood, roughly turning it to face the wall.

His irritation only makes him feel worse, mind spinning and spiraling around in a flurry of self-hatred, a constant, internal beratement for letting his thoughts get the best of him. Perhaps his nightmares were a cosmic punishment of some-sort. It’s what he deserved, after all, for having a weak heart and a broken mind. He wasn’t strong enough to protect them, if his stupid brain was so affected by something as meaningless as a bad dream. Wasn’t worth all the effort they put into making a nice breakfast if his stupid stomach couldn’t handle it. He was the biggest, no matter what Duck said, he had to

put it to use *somehow*. What good was he to them if his heightened stature and much thicker form could be so physically affected by a few twisted thoughts? Useless, that's what he was. Absolutely useless.

The water runs cold by the time he gets out, head pounding, smelling of Duck's Dawn soap. Previously he'd been angry and filthy, now he was simply angry and damp. He scrubs at himself with a towel, roughly drying his body, his yarn, the movements only making his headache worse and worse. Perhaps he had a brain tumor, that would explain the nightmare, and the constant, agonizing throb in his head. The thought made his stomach twinge, a touch of paranoia added to his irritation, and he had to brace himself against the sink for a moment to regroup.

"You're fine," he growls, staring into the steam covered mirror. His blurred form, merely a red smear against the obscured glass, stared back, unimpressed. "Stop fucking *shaking*, you're fine. Everything's fine. No tumors, no skulls, no bloody oil spills here. You're being *stupid!* "

A muffled shout from the other room draws his attention, and a stab of fear slices through his gut. He'd done it, he'd left them alone and something bad had happened. He was so stupid, so, so *stupid.* He wrenches the door open, flinging it against the wall, a sick swirl of déjà vu curling in his chest. *Idiot,* he thought, as he galloped into the cold air, head going light at the change in pressure. *You've let them down, you left them vulnerable, so worried about yourself. Just had to pop off and leave them alone, how selfish.*

He stumbles into the sitting room in a blind panic, body feeling as though he'd been squeezed through a tiny hole, vision tunneling, slowly processing the sight of his housemates arguing over the volume of the television.

The shout had apparently emanated from Duck, who was currently stood, hands on his hips, shrieking at Yellow loud enough to be heard over the blaring TV. Yellow was, in turn, completely ignoring Duck, focused intently on the telly, channel tuned to some episode of a numbers station, droning androgynous voice reading out random digits. From what he could make out the youngest had snuck off without wiping down the counter, and that Yellow was a *rude little git* , and that the numbers station was stuck in a loop of ***zero, nine, zero, nine, zero, nine, zero, nine, zero, nine, zero, nine, zero, nine, zero, nine, zero, nine, zero, nine, zer-***

"Shut UP!" Red thunders, voice edging on manic, chest heaving. He's forcefully twisted the volume knob to mute, nearly wrenching the entire TV off the stand. Ears ringing in the sudden, stunned silence, blood rushing through his head. Anger pushing up and up and out and forcefully exploding from his mouth, words shredding themselves as they scrape against his sharpened maw. Yarn swinging, pulling back, his hideous mouth bared to the world, twisted in an overwhelmed snarl. His head throbs like a heartbeat, brain prickling and fizzling, pain icepick sharp. "Can you not be quiet for ***FIVE MINUTES?****"*

The stillness that fills the room is nearly as jarring as the continuous noise. Red stands, gasping, breaths erratic. His housemates, his *family* , are silent for a moment, as if processing what had just happened. Duck shakes his head, bringing one palm up to thump at his ear, as if to clear the ringing. Red just stands, energy spent, as if his single explosion of anger had sapped any stamina he had. Knees water-weak, Red drifts listlessly to his chair, shaking hand catching the arm of it.

"Well you don't need to shout." Duck scolds, annoyed. Yellow just stays quiet, looking surprised at his sudden outburst. He's not scared, not really, but his eyes are round in shock, and doesn't that just hit Red like a kick to the gut? "What in the dickens has gotten into you today? It's like your brain is lagging ten feet behind you, honestly."

"I don't- I don't know," Red swallows, hard. "I had a, uh, a really weird dream."

"Well, I'm sorry to hear that." Duck's arms are crossed, but his voice lacks bite. He's squinting again, taking in Red's shaking frame and tangled yarn. Yellow stands from the rug then, tucking himself half-behind the shortest one, face worried. The sight of it is like a cold bucket of water being thrown sharply in Red's face, anger flushing his system and making room for an all-consuming guilt. He'd screamed at them, the two most important people in his world, the ones he tried so hard to protect, had been screamed at. By *him*. "Is that why you've been acting the fool?"

The guilt makes his knees give, finally buckling, as if his body can't support the weight of his shame. He sits heavily on his chair, limbs askew, like a broken-down doll. For a moment Duck and Yellow just look at each other, confused, until the tallest one began to make a strange noise. Slow, rhythmic sounds were crawling out of his mouth, his body jerking with each little outburst.

"Oh! oh dear." Red hears Duck sigh, voice strangely warm, as if amused. "There he goes. I thought that might happen."

"Is he alright?" Yellow wrings his hands, brows pinched. "He looks like he's going to vomit."

"Hush, child," Duck says, tone mild. "He just needs a moment."

The sounds grew louder, like a strange mix between a laugh and a cough, before Red hunched forward, burying his face in his hands. Shoulders quaking with each muffled sob, back shuddering, the constant motion of anguish overtaking his body.

"I'm sorry," Red rasps out, voice wavering brokenly. "I'm *so sorry* , I sh-ouldn't have y-yelled at you two." His chest gives one more jerk, before he completely dissolves into tears. The air filled with loud, gasping cries that looked and

sounded painful, a high-pitched moan of sorrow leaking out from behind his quickly remoistened yarn. “I’m sor-ry, *I’m s-so-orry*.”

“Duck,” Yellow whispers, tears gathering in his own eyes. “Why’s he- what's he *doing?* What’s happening? Is his words broken?”

“It’s okay,” Duck soothes, voice calm for both Red’s sake as much as Yellow’s. “He’s just crying. You do it all the time.”

“Oh,” Yellow calms, “But I thought that…I thought you guys didn’t do that?”

“We don’t as much, but it still happens sometimes.” Duck gently tugs at Yellow’s hand, leading him up to Red’s quaking form. “He just needs to let it out, he’ll be fine after.” He pats Red’s shoulder briskly, motioning for the youngest to do the same. “There, see?”

Red cries harder, there’s a gentle kindness in Duck’s tone, even after he’d been so rotten.

“Red?” Yellow is running his hand up and down the other’s shoulder, a clumsy imitation of Duck’s own soothing motions. Petting Red as if he were a large dog, all sticky hands and uneven pressure. “It’s okay, everything will be okay. Duck said!”

“But I- I shouted at you,” Red keens, shaking so badly it makes his teeth chatter. “You should be f-urious with me. You should- you should *hate me*.”

“I don’t hate you,” Yellow says, voice confused. As if he’d never thought of the word ‘hate’ in relation to Red in his entire life. “I like you. You’re big and nice and fun to hug, ‘nd you hardly ever shout at all. You just used a taller voice this time.”

“He’s right, you barely even yelled. It was like being scolded by an old lady. Hardly the traumatizing experience you seem to think it is.”

“B-ut I shouldn't’ve,” He sucks air in, painfully coughing as it catches in his sore throat.

“Pish,” Duck’s hand has moved higher, gently carding his hand through Red’s yarn. “As I said, it wasn’t even a shout, more like a weak gurgle. Scarcely a reason for either of us to hate you, you daft beast. Anyway, you need to work on your diaphragm control, like I do. When you talk louder, people respect you more!”

“But I don’t w-want to talk louder,” he hiccups, grinding the heels of his hands into his eyes. “I don’t *want* to- to shout at you. I sh’ld’ve never- I would *ne-ever*-” His words are cut off by a razor-sharp sob, lungs straining, more tears squeezing through his screwed-shut eyes.

“Calm *down*.” Duck huffs, hands coming up to untangle a knot near his eyes, feathered fingers sinking into wet yarn. “You’re going to pass out, and I’m not going to break my back picking you up off the floor.”

“I’ll pick him up,” Yellow says, bringing one small hand up to rest on the tallest one’s temple. Fingers absently tapping a soothing tempo, the sensation of it releasing some of the pressure built up in Red’s head. “I’m- I’m strong enough, I could do it.”

“Hush up, you’ll break your back even faster. And then what? I’ll have to play nursemaid to you both? I don’t think so.”

A broken noise leaks out of Red, pulled from the darkest depths of his chest, all jumbled vowels and half-hearted consonants.

“Stop- stop be-ing *nice*.” He coughs again, back heaving. “I don’t de-serve nice. I acted like my-my- *them*. I acted like *him*.”

He can only hope that Duck’s able to catch the emphasis in his words. All he can think of is the painful tones of his red brethren, of the horrible treatment Yellow must have experienced during his time with his father. He reflects on the multitude of pains the youngest will hint at, the horrifying asides he brings up in casual conversations, as if Roy’s actions were normal. And now Red sits, ashamed, guilty of the same crimes, if only in his own mind.

“Oh, shut up, you absolute ninny.” Duck has taken to picking apart the rest of the nits left in his yarn, fingers gentle, tone scolding. “You’re nothing like those people, as far as I can tell, you’re the best of all of them. *Obviously*. After all, you’ve chosen to spend your time with me! Of course you’d end up being the smartest, most remarkable one.”

“Shut up,” Red chokes out, throat closing around a watery huff, relief creeping in cautiously, like the sun after a violent storm.

“I mean it! It’s proof of intelligence that you’d rather be here with us than out there with them. And as for-” He breaks off, cutting a quick glance at Yellow. “As for *that man*, you couldn’t ever be like him, even if you tried.”

“Like who?” Yellow asks, lip wobbly. Clearly growing more anxious the longer Red’s distress lingers.

“Colonel Sanders,” Duck says quickly, not meeting Yellow’s eyes. “They were rivals in uni.”

“Huh,” Yellow scowls a moment, a serious look overtaking his upset. “Well…I hate him too, then! Kernel sandals is banned from coming up to and- and into our house!”

The trio is quiet then, Yellow smugly gone back to petting Red's head, content now that his declaration has been made. Red can feel Duck's hand shaking on his cheek, and curiosity pulls his face back out of his hands, eyes a mess of tears, glancing out to see what was happening. He takes in the way the avian is holding back laughter, as if his life depends on it, and chokes back his own soggy chuckles in turn. He quirks his brow, receives a glare back in return, and promptly breaks into fully audible laughter.

"Ah…I'm in a right s-state." He guffaws, drawing a hand across his eyes, the strangeness of his behavior settling in. "I don't know what's wrong with-with me, I'm a *mess*. I'm supposed to have more con-control of the situation than this."

"Let me take care of it for once, stupid." Duck is laughing now too, and Yellow has taken to hopping from side to side in some sort of interpretive jig, flapping his hands happily. "I'm meant to be the dad, remember?"

"I thought I was the father figure," Red gasps, laughing and crying in tandem, like his mind has been cracked down the middle. Maybe it has. But he feels better now, the best he has since waking that morning, fear slowly loosening its grip on his throat.

"What 'bout me?" Yellow says, movements stilled now, both hands pushing into the yarn covering Red's face, innocently playing with the hard lines of his cheeks, thumbs grazing sharp canines. "I could be dad for once."

"You're the pet," Duck snarks, gently cuffing his head. "And the kid. Like a baby goat."

"I like goats! They make very delicious cheeses."

"You have never eaten goat cheese in your life."

"Yes, I have! You- you just weren't there for it."

"Yeah?" Red sniffles, tears lazily slowing to a crawl. His sinuses feel like they're stuffed with cotton, but his headache is nearly gone. "And where were we when you w-were eating this cheese, huh?"

"Dunno," Yellow huffs, "Can't keep track of you all the time. I've got other stuff, and, and *things* going on you know."

"No cheek," Duck grouses, "If you want to try goat cheese you could just ask, not make up imaginary stories about your culinary escapades."

"But I've already tried it!" Yellow wraps his arms fully around Red's neck, burying his face in the older one's shoulder, embarrassed. Red just hugs him back, trembling a little, wanting desperately to open his arm and beckon his other housemate in. Afraid that it'd be too much, too familiar, mind screaming that he'd be rebuked, mocked. His heart couldn't take the rejection, not after this horrible morning, feeling almost fragile in his post-sobbing state. He chances a look at Duck, eyes dark and glassy, and is met with a full view of the other gazing affectionately back at him. Eyes lidded; mouth quirked knowingly.

"What's this? Excluding me from the group hug, eh?" He shuffles forward, tucking himself into Red's side. "It's rude to exclude, you know that."

"Shut up," Red sniffles, blood rushing back into his cheeks again. He releases Yellow with one arm, reaching to gather Duck nearer to him, gently knocking their foreheads together before resting his head on the shortest one's shoulder. Body sagging fully in relief at the warm weight of holding them both in his arms, a physical confirmation of their safety.

"There we go, you big softie. I should hope you're feeling better?" Duck's words vibrate through Red's body, the pitchy timbre of it deliciously familiar. Red simply nods, face burning, jostling Yellow, who had turned to wrap an arm around Duck as well.

"I am!"

"I wasn't asking *you!* I was asking *him!*"

"Yeah." Red laughs, deep in his belly, his tone edging on crazed. Physically exhausted, but mind finally, *finally*, calming. "I am."

Taking advantage of his larger stature he sits back, dragging the other two up into his chair as he sighs contentedly. Settling them to rest on his lap, arms full, one housemate apiece. He cradles them both close, a squirmy tenderness igniting in his belly as Yellow squeals happily, burrowing his face into Red's soft chest. Ignoring Duck's sputtered, half-hearted protests at the sudden manhandling, savoring the soft brush of the avian's cheek resting against his broad shoulder. Face hot, eyes bright, a red hand being caught in a smaller, greener grip, gentle and loving. For the first time that day, he smiles, leaning against the backrest and closing his eyes.

"I really am."

Notes:

Did you know I originally started this series because I wanted to focus on giving Yellow guy more comfort than he got in cannon? Somehow this has morphed into me projecting my fears and self-perceived personal shortcomings onto

Red. Ah well, best intentions and all that

Also, I wrote the entire nightmare portion on Halloween, I just really got into the spirit of the season I guess. Anyway the gore was soooooooo fun to write! I love that DHMIS canonically gives me an excuse to work on my horror stylings, hope it wasn't too cheesy!

Title is from Dream Work by Mary Oliver, the full quote is "I began to pick through the red rivers of confusion; I began to take apart the deep stitches of nightmares." which I think fits in very well with the characterization of my favorite emotionally traumatized red mop.

PS: Literally nothing is funnier to me than the thought of them going to a completely normal Tesco

EDIT: Follow my NEW DHMIS Tumblr @myshredda (as I'm not sure twitter will be around much long lol)

Series this work belongs to:

- ← Previous Work (http://archiveofourown.org/works/42709320) Part 4 of home is where I want to be, but I guess I'm already there (http://archiveofourown.org/series/3179772) Next Work → (http://archiveofourown.org/works/43026237)

Close (#)